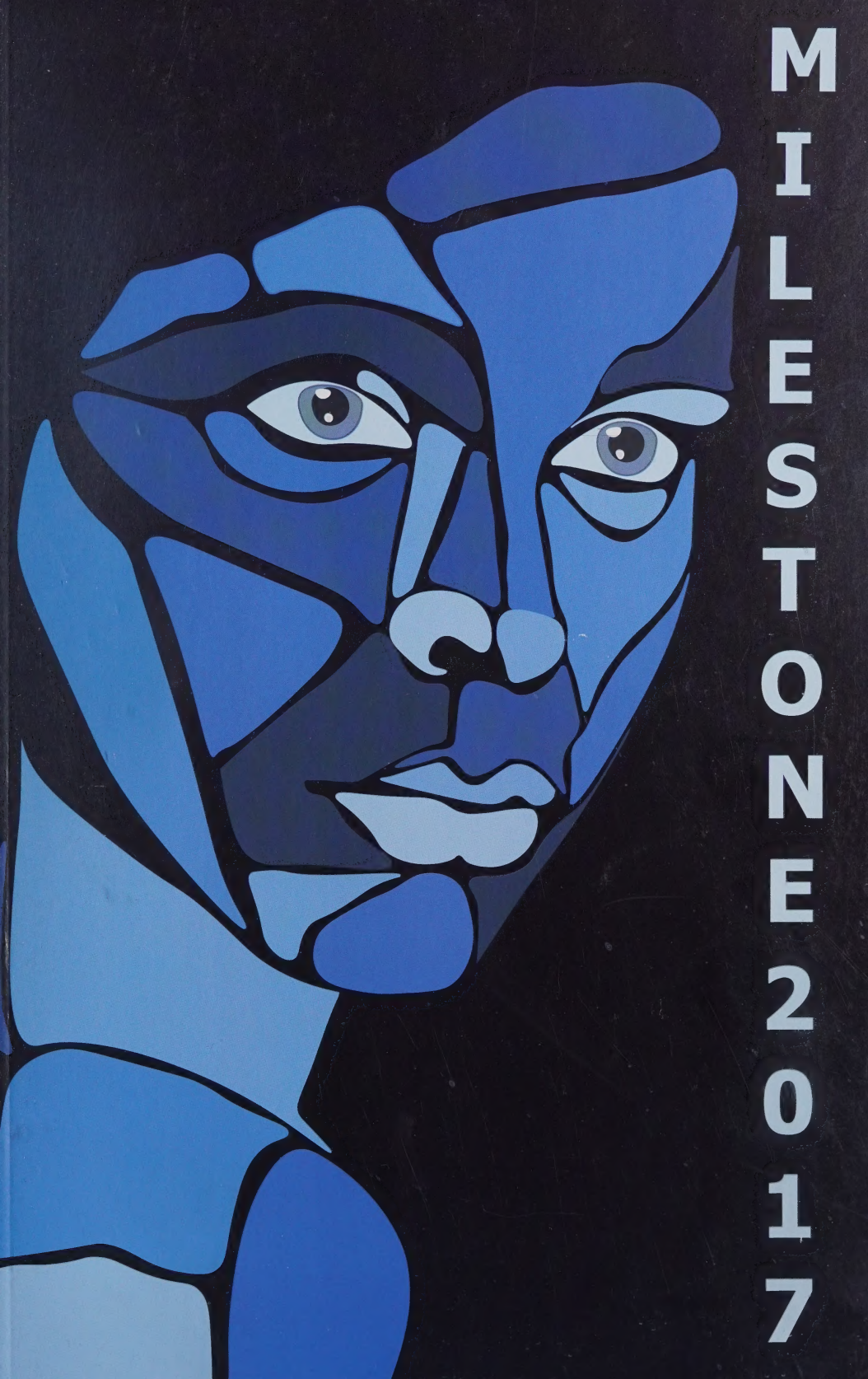
MILESTONE 2017

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Volume 12 2017

Art & Literature Review

Creative Expressions of Western North Carolina Artists & Writers

Southwestern
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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Mission Statement
Milestone is the biennial art and literature review published by Southwestern Community College. The purpose of this publication is to showcase the creative expressions of Western North Carolina artists and writers.

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Toni Knott
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All prose and poetry submissions are chosen via blind review.

While Southwestern Community College makes every effort to preserve *Milestone* contributors' freedom of expression, the works of art contained in this publication do not necessarily reflect the values or beliefs of SCC faculty, staff, and administrators.

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Dedication

This edition of the *Milestone* is dedicated to Dr. Gene Norton, long-time instructor in the English/Humanities Department and member of the *Milestone* Selection Committee.

Milestone

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Luis Perez

Bear Mile

First Place ~ Art

40 Days and 40 Nights

Rachel Harbaugh

First place ~ poetry

"I'm giving up men."
The auburn haired girl proclaimed to her aunt
Through the too-taut phone line that
Stretches over stooped mountain faces and
Loops around pine trees and sweet gums
Until finally coming to a rest in a
Little prefabricated double wide
Planted firmly between a half overgrown graveyard
And a lone looming Douglas Fir that some low-flying
Bird decided to cultivate after a big meal.

And her aunt laughed
But not laughed at her
Because she knew what it was like
Knew how it felt to give and give and give
Little pieces of your heart away to
Duct tape broken hearts whose owners didn't want them fixed.
She knew the pain and the disappointment a girl
Feels when a kiss is supposed to make you feel something
Make your heart race and your soul smile
But it does neither and you feel sad
And lean into the kiss
Searching for that feeling among too-dry lips
And strange half-beard half-stubble covered chins
And lingering tastes of cigarette smoke and Miller Lite.
And you know you won't find it but you can't help but try

So you try
Over
And over
And over
Until a kiss doesn't even mean a thing anymore.
Except as a Mason jar to catch those butterflies you lost
When you were too eager to grow up and
Prove your momma wrong and
Your daddy wronger
And yourself right.

You wanted to know how the world worked and
You found out
Saw it in all its
Ruined glory
You always found beauty in ugliness
Thought cracked mirrors simply showed your true reflection
And you were right
Because we're all cracked and some cracks
You can't caulk out.

"I think that'd be a good idea."
Her aunt whispered
Voice half-laughing and half-serious
And the girl remembered when she didn't notice the
Heaviness of people's eyes over the phone
She had been a happy child
Music made her soul fly
And her feet stomp
And she would dance from one end of the house to the other to
The sound of a fiddle and a Yankee man singing songs about mules
But one day she felt sad
And had not yet gotten over it.

Weeks went by
The phone line hung loosely across the miles
The woods dying skin covering the thin cable.
And the girl did not mean to not call
And the aunt knew.

The girl was raised to keep your promises
And to survive the 40 days of Lent with
Her head held high and
Just the right dosages of humility
And self-satisfaction.
But the girl didn't expect hazel eyes
To cross her path.
Didn't expect her soul to perk up
At the sound of laughter
And artist's hands.
Couldn't understand why
This beautiful man
Looked at her like she was the
Most beautifully precious thing

He'd ever seen.
But it did and he did and she started
To realize
She was turning into a cliché
And that frightened her
More than she could explain.
But she was happy
Finally content.

She saw those couples who had remnants of
Past generations
Etched on their entwined hands.
Had seen them all her life.
Dwindling numbers.
Becoming an almost extinct species.
And she wanted that
Wanted the pure love she saw
On the crackled black and white photograph
Of her Grandmama and Granddaddy
Stepping out of a car the day after they were married.

But love like that doesn't exist anymore
At least not for someone like her
Someone with a broken mind
And a quiet mouth
And this strange obsession with the bittersweet.
And a Band-Aid heart itching to give more
Always more
Until there is nothing left to pump blood
To her veins
And she shrivels up
Into nothing
Like grave-dirt tossed aside
By an emaciated coyote
Driven mad by the dark moon
And the dry earth
And the bitter scent of blood congealing
On a deep wound
Filled with death.

The Money Fields

Bob Satterwhite

First place ~ Short Story

In July, we picked green beans, holding the tender vines with one hand, carefully pulling off clumps of the long, skinny pods with the other hand, and dropping them into a funnel-shaped, flat-bottom bushel basket that seemed to take forever to fill. When a basket was full, we lugged it to the end of the row, picked up an empty basket, and started over.

I hated picking beans, not just because it was hard work, but because it was so boring and so tedious. I picked them because I needed the money. Mr. Wise paid fifty cents a bushel, and I could make four dollars a day, sometimes more if I really hustled. I stooped over the vines until my back felt as if it were going to break. I stretched, moved my arms around to get the stiffness out, and picked while squatted, duck-walking along the rows until my kneecaps were ready to pop out. I would stretch again and pick stooped over. There is just no comfortable way to pick beans. By the end of July, I hated the sight of a green bean.

Mr. Wise sat in the truck bed, both doors open because of the heat, smoking his pipe. He would walk the rows to see how we were doing, pointing out a vine with his pipe stem.

"Here're some you missed," he'd say, or, "Be careful and don't break those vines. I want to get another harvest in a couple of weeks."

A picked-over row of green beans reminds me of how trees look just before a summer storm, the way the wind turns the leaves over, exposing their pale green undersides. After a day or two, though, you can't tell that the vines have been touched except for dried, broken pieces of vines scattered between the rows.

We picked all the full pods, even the ones with brown or yellow spots and the ones that had places that looked as if tiny men with big teeth had taken bites. A basket had to be filled. Sometimes I'd find a caterpillar on a vine – fat and green with tiny horns on its head. I would carefully lift it off the vine and drop it in the basket, and I'd imagine how it would be at the farmers' market when some town lady reached in the basket and pulled out a big handful of green beans with that ugly caterpillar poking its head out. It made me laugh just thinking about it.

Ten of us picked the beans, mostly boys from the neighborhood and a few men who had been laid off from their jobs. The men were quick and efficient, and they could pick at least ten bushels a day. It took us about four days to pick a field, and a week later, we'd pick again, but after July, the vines stopped producing.

Mornings weren't so bad, but the afternoons were miserably hot. Grime collected in the sweaty creases of my neck and in the folds of my arms. I could feel a thin film of grit when I ran my tongue across my teeth. When we did a good job, Mr. Wise let us boys knock off early for a swim in the creek. We always brought our bathing trunks, hanging them on the stanchions of the truck. Nothing felt better than that cold creek water after a hot day in the fields.

I especially remember the summer of my fourteenth birthday, the summer my father was laid off at the furniture plant. I worked for just about all the farmers in the community

that summer, trying to make enough money to buy a bike. Wanting that bike kept me in the fields.

That was also the summer we heard gun shots while working in one of the bean fields—two quick, sharp cracks beyond the woods, followed by two dull echoes. A few minutes later, we heard three more shots.

"Sounds like somebody's shooting over at old man Wesler's place," Mr. Wise said. "Probably shooting snakes." He stepped out of the truck cab, shaded his eyes, and looked across the field. Everyone stopped picking to look, but all we could see were trees. Mr. Wesler's place was a half-mile away. Nothing more was said, and we returned to our picking.

Old man Wesler lived by himself on a fifty-acre farm, had lived there for as long as people could remember. People in the community called him a hermit, probably because he'd never married, and he seldom socialized. My best friend Jolley and I sometimes cut through his place on Sunday afternoons on our way to Paddys Creek to fish for trout. Mr. Wesler would be sitting on his porch in a straight-back chair, hands on his knees, an old, gray hat shading his eyes. He never spoke to us.

Mr. Wesler didn't hire anyone to work for him, like other farmers in the community, but he didn't farm all that much. He had a milk cow, some chickens, and a few head of beef cattle, and he raised a few vegetables but not enough to sell at the farmers' market. Everyone was surprised when he let a family move into an old cabin on his place and put them to work.

For some reason, people in the community believed that Mr. Wesler had a lot of money, and that he had it buried around his farm because he didn't trust banks. My father said it was just idle gossip. But the thought of buried money fascinated me. It made me think of pirate treasure. I sometimes daydreamed about walking through his place on my way to the creek and finding a big wad of money stuffed in a hollow log—hundred dollar bills, so many I couldn't count them. I wanted very badly to have money so I wouldn't have to work in the fields all summer to buy my bike. I felt really bad about wanting Mr. Wesler's money, especially after what happened.

Two days after we heard the shots, Mr. Wesler was found dead. Someone had shot him five times with a .22 rifle and dumped his body into his well. The killer had ransacked the house, probably looking for money. The news of it was on the radio and television and in the newspaper. The newspaper headline said, "Recluse Found Shot to Death/Thrown into 50-Foot Well."

Daryl Browning, the father of the family that Mr. Wesler had taken in, would have been the prime suspect if he hadn't been in jail...and even then people had their suspicions that somehow he had gotten out of jail long enough to kill Mr. Wesler.

I heard Mrs. Poteet tell someone at Dellinger's store that it had to be Daryl. "Who would want to harm that old man 'cept somebody like Daryl Browning? I'd bet everthing I own it weren't nobody around here that did it." She said this as she rammed her groceries into a bag so hard I thought she was going to punch out the bottom.

The Brownings had been living at the Wesler farm about a year. Mr. Wesler found them in the woods near the creek living in a lean-to, camped out like gypsies. No one knows how they got there, unless they walked, because they didn't have a car or hardly anything else for that matter. Mr. Wesler discovered them after he caught the two older boys, Ralph and Eugene, stealing eggs from his hen house. There were seven of them, including the parents.

Only three of the children were school age. Ralph was sixteen and Eugene was my age. Their school-age sister was ten.

Mr. Wesler let the Brownings move into the cabin and gave them food from his pantry, milk from his cow, and vegetables from his garden. He let Daryl and the two older boys do some paid work around the farm until Daryl was arrested for breaking into a grocery store over in Brendletown. He had to serve time because he had been arrested before on similar charges.

Ralph and Eugene and their sister rode our school bus that spring. When the bus drove up to their stop in the mornings, Ralph would be puffing away on a cigarette. He'd make a big show of taking a last couple of drags, grind the butt under his heel, and get on the bus still blowing smoke. I guess he thought it made him look big. The three of them would squeeze into one of the seats and sit there without saying a word. You could tell they were pretty bad off by their clothes and the pinched look around their eyes. It made me a bit uncomfortable to be around Ralph and Eugene because I could almost smell their poverty. Not that my family was rich; we weren't. Daddy tended our farm and worked in the furniture factory in town. Mama made extra money selling her "crafts," as she called them—wind chimes and clay-pot planters. We had a hard time just getting by. I helped Daddy with farm work and made spending money working for the truck-farmers in the community. I think I was a little afraid that we might be poor like the Brownings someday, especially if Daddy lost the farm. The small farm, about forty acres, had been in the family for three generations, and Daddy was determined to hold on to it.

My seat on the school bus was across the aisle from the Browning kids. Ralph caught me watching them a couple of times, and he would scowl at me.

"Whatchu looking at?" he said once, his lip curling on one side like some television bad guy. I never said anything back. I didn't like him, and I was a bit afraid of him. Eugene was okay. He was real shy, but he was friendly.

Although Ralph was two years older, he was in the same grade with Eugene and me, in some of our classes. He never did his homework or answered questions in class. He just sat at his desk, sullen, eyes straight ahead, his arms folded. I never saw him playing with the other kids either. I asked him once if he wanted to play ball with us, but he just looked at me squinty-eyed and said, "Hell no," and walked away. Eugene would join us after a bit of coaxing.

I was running to meet Jolley during recess one day and took a shortcut around the side of the main building. I almost ran over Ralph. He was hunkered down, back against the red brick wall, puffing on a cigarette.

"You better watch where you're going," he said.

"Sorry," I said. "I didn't see you." I wanted to run on, but for some reason, I stopped and walked back to him. He watched me, trying to look mean with that cigarette dangling from his lips like Humphrey Bogart.

"How come you're always so mad at everybody?" I asked.

He stared at me and slowly got up. I thought he was going to hit me. He took the cigarette out of his mouth and flipped it into the bushes. "Why don't you mind your own business," he said.

I didn't try talking to him again.

Soon as school was out, most of the boys in the community went to work in the fields, helping plant, cultivate, and harvest the truck crops. It was hard work, but it was

the only work available. We did onions first, then squash and cucumbers. After that it was tomatoes and beans, and in late summer, potatoes and corn. Ralph and Eugene joined the work crews after their father went to jail. Eugene did okay and worked hard, but I could tell that Ralph didn't like the work one bit. I was surprised he lasted as long as he did. He and Eugene quit about a week before Mr. Wesler was killed.

Everyone in the community was shook up about the murder. Some of the men started carrying their hunting rifles in their pickups. It wasn't a good time to be snooping around at night. You could get shot. Four days after Mr. Wesler was killed, the sheriff arrested Bobby Helms. Bobby was nineteen, and he made his living cutting pulpwood and doing crop work for neighbors. Everyone who knew Bobby said he was a good boy and a hard worker, not a murderer, but Bobby's rifle was identified as the murder weapon. Deputies found the rifle in the well. Bobby insisted he didn't know anything about the shooting. He told the sheriff he hadn't been around that day, that he'd been crappie fishing at Johns Lake. Alone.

He said he had loaned his rifle to Helen Browning, Ralph and Eugene's mother, because she lived out there in the woods alone with those children and needed it to protect herself. But when the deputies questioned Helen Browning, she said she didn't know anything about the rifle. The sheriff put Bobby in jail. I heard that Bobby was upset that Helen Browning wouldn't back his story. A lot of people in the community were upset too, mainly because the sheriff seemed too willing to believe Helen Browning and not Bobby Helms.

It did look pretty bad for Bobby because he had been hanging around the Browning place since Daryl Browning was sent to prison.

"I'm just helping her out some 'cause she don't have a man around, that's all," Bobby told his mother. Helen Browning was an attractive woman, slender, dark haired and dark skinned. She'd had Ralph when she was barely fourteen. People said Helen Browning had Indian blood or Negro blood. I remember the newspaper stories describing her as "the attractive impoverished mother of five children." It was a small community and just about everyone knew that Bobby was involved more than just helping Helen Browning out, especially when he didn't get home until after daylight a lot of mornings. People thought it was scandalous, but they blamed Helen Browning more than they blamed Bobby.

"Why, she's just taking advantage of that boy, and her an experienced woman like she is," I overheard one woman say at church. There were some who worried what might happen to Bobby when Daryl Browning got out of prison.

Eugene and I became friends, sort of, when he and Ralph worked with the field crews. Eugene took up with me, and I showed him what to do. He and Ralph never brought their lunch, so I asked Mama to pack an extra sandwich and some cookies to share with Eugene. A couple of the other boys offered to share their lunches with Ralph, but he wouldn't take anything. He'd get off to himself during lunch breaks and smoke his cigarettes.

Eugene asked me why I was working on the field crews, and I told him about the bicycle, how badly I wanted one. I'd been wanting a bike since I was eight years old, but we never seemed to have enough money to get one. The money I made during the summers usually went for my school clothes, but Mama told me that if I saved up enough money to buy a bike, she'd pay for my school clothes. By the middle of the summer, I had seventy-five dollars saved. The bike I wanted, a five-speed, cost one hundred and fifteen dollars. I figured I would make enough in the bean fields to pay for it. Eugene told me that he and Ralph had to work because their mother made them.

"We have to buy groceries with what we make," he said. "She don't let us keep any, but Ralph keeps out enough to buy cigarettes."

That made me feel really selfish, but when I had a hundred dollars saved, all I could think about was my bicycle, riding up and down the road, going to Johns Lake to fish and swim. I was really looking forward to having it. One afternoon when I came home from the fields, Mama and Daddy were sitting at the kitchen table with their budget book, both of them looking gloomy.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"Sit down, son," Daddy said. "We need to talk to you."

I could tell it was going to be bad news just by looking at them, and, sure enough, it was. An insurance payment was due, and the only money available was what Mama had saved for my school clothes.

"I'm sorry, son," Mama said, "but I won't be able to buy your school clothes after all. You'll have to pay for them."

"That's okay," I said. "I don't need anything new. I can wear what I've got."

"You can't do that. None of last year's clothes will fit you. You've grown like a weed. And you need new shoes and a new coat."

I knew she was wrong, so I went to my room, got out my winter clothes, and tried them on. Everything I had was too small. I couldn't believe it. For the first time, I was angry that I was growing so fast.

I'm ashamed to admit it, but I got really upset and told them they didn't have any right to make me use my bike money to buy clothes. I went to my room and cried like a little kid, but after thinking about it, I realized how it must have hurt them to ask me to do that. It made me feel like a spoiled brat. We were family, and we all had to work together. The next morning, I took my hundred dollars out of my cigar box and gave it to Mama.

"I'm really sorry you have to do this," Mama said, "I know how much you want that bike."

"It's okay," I said, and it was.

"Soon as we get some money coming in, we'll pay you back, and you can buy your bicycle. I promise."

I knew she would pay me back, but I still couldn't help but feel disappointed. When you want something as badly as I wanted that bike, it's not easy to give it up.

A couple of days later, Eugene asked me when I was getting my bike.

"Guess you 'bout have enough to buy it now, ain't you?"

I told him what happened.

"I ain't never had a bike either," he said. "I know how you feel."

Right after that, Ralph and Eugene stopped coming to the fields. I saw them at Dellinger's store a few weeks later after we'd finished picking beans for Mr. Wise. Several of us boys were drinking Pepsi with peanuts poured in the top. It makes a good drink, a little salty and a little sweet.

When the two boys came into the store, Eugene smiled and spoke. Ralph bought some groceries and a pack of cigarettes and headed for the door. "Let's go," he said to Eugene, but Eugene hung back and waited until Ralph was gone. He motioned for me to follow him outside. Ralph was walking up the road.

"I got something to show you," Eugene said. "You got to promise not to tell anybody."

"Okay," I said.

"Cross your heart and hope to die?"

"Yes," I said, making a cross on my chest.

"Meet me at the swimming hole tomorrow when you get off work, and I'll show you."

I was really curious about what Eugene had to show me. Soon as I got off work, I headed for the creek. Eugene was waiting. He had a faded Quaker Oats cereal box under one arm. He took off the lid and handed the box to me. It was full of bills: five, tens, and twenties. I had never seen so much money.

"Me and Ralph found it," he said. "Mama's got a whole apron full of money, and Ralph's got a shoebox full. This here's mine."

He took the box from me and pulled out five twenty-dollar bills.

"Here," he said. "Now you can buy your bike. I'm gonna buy one, too, and Ralph's gonna buy a pickup with his."

"I can't take this money," I said. "Didn't it belong to Mr. Wesler?"

"He's dead," Ralph said. "He don't care who gets it."

"Where did you find it?"

"It was buried in the field next to his house."

I looked at the bills. They smelled musty and were all wrinkled.

"Won't nobody know, and I got plenty more."

Mr. Wesler didn't have any close relatives apparently. No one had been around to see about him, and the only people who went to his funeral were from the community. Maybe it was all right if the Brownings had the money. They certainly needed it.

I put the bills in my pocket. Eugene looked pleased.

"Thanks," I said.

"Guess I'd better go," Eugene said. "Remember. Don't tell anybody where you got it. Okay?"

"I won't."

Eugene took off through the woods, the oatmeal box tucked under his arm. That night in my room, I took the bills out and looked at them for a long time. Then I put the bills in a sock and hid it in the back of one of my drawers. I wanted to think about it awhile before I told my parents. I was afraid they might need that money, too.

A couple of days later, I overheard my parents talking about the Brownings.

"What did they do?" I asked.

"They just up and left," Daddy said. "The sheriff went to check on Mrs. Browning, and they were gone. Something mighty fishy is going on. Mr. Dellinger said the boys had been spending a lot of money at the store lately."

"I know where they got it," I said. "They found it. Ralph and Eugene. They found Mr. Wesler's buried money,"

I rushed to my room, got the sock, and took it to the kitchen. I pulled out the bills and placed them on the table.

Daddy looked at me, his eyes wide."Where did you get this?"

"Eugene gave it to me. It's part of the money they found. It's theirs. They found it buried in the field next to Mr. Wesler's house."

Daddy took the bills, smoothed them out on the table. They were wrinkled and the color of green beans. He stared at the money,

"My God," he said, "Those boys must have done it. Or their mother. They killed Mr. Wesler and took his money."

My heart was racing. Daddy called the sheriff and told him about the money. Within an hour, the sheriff was at our house. He took the bills, folded them, and put them in his shirt pocket. The next day, they found the Brownings in a motel near the Tennessee line. Ralph had bought his truck.

I doubt that Ralph would have ever admitted anything. When a deputy took Eugene to a room away from Ralph for questioning, he looked at his younger brother and said very calmly, "You keep your trap shut." Soon as they got Eugene alone, he started crying and talking. Daddy got the story from the sheriff.

Helen Browning had been visiting Mr. Wesler for months, even before Daryl went to jail, spending nights there and getting money from him. He apparently got tired of her and wouldn't see her and stopped giving her money. She borrowed a rifle from Bobby Helms, gave it to Ralph, and sent him to get Mr. Wesler's money. "He's got money hid all over that house," she told him. "You get it any way you have to. We need it a lot more than he does."

Ralph took the .22 pump rifle, filled it with shells, and he and Eugene went to Mr. Wesler's house. They waited in the bushes outside the front door until the old man came out. Ralph lifted the rifle and shot Mr. Wesler twice as he was walking out the door. Mr. Wesler grabbed his chest, moaned, and fell to the porch. The boys ran over to see if he was dead. Soon as they were close enough, Mr. Wesler grabbed the rifle barrel and tried to take it from Ralph.

"Don't kill me, boys. Please don't kill me," he cried out.

Ralph tried to jerk the rifle free, but the old man held on.

"Get a stick or something," Ralph yelled. Eugene found a piece of stove wood. "Hit him," Ralph yelled. "Hit his arms."

When Ralph was able to get the rifle free, he stepped back and fired three times into Mr. Wesler's face. Then they tore the house apart. Hidden in the closet was a cigar box full of money. They found the oatmeal box in a kitchen cabinet and found more money in a trunk in the attic, almost five thousand dollars total. After they found the money, the two boys carried Mr. Wesler's body to the well and dumped him in head first.

Helen Browning finally confessed to her part in the killing, but Ralph never admitted anything. Helen Browning was sentenced to twenty-five years in prison. Ralph was given life. Eugene was sent to a juvenile training school because he was too young to be tried in a criminal court.

I never saw any of them again. After the trial and sentencing were over, the sheriff came to the house. He handed me the five twenty-dollar bills. "I guess this is yours," he said. "Ain't nobody claiming it."

I shook my head. "I can't take it," I said. "It don't seem right."

Daddy nodded his head and smiled.

When everything returned to normal, Jolley and I went to the Wesler place one Sunday afternoon. The windows were boarded, and the door had a big padlock and a sign that said, "No Trespassing." The well also was boarded up. There were big holes in the yard, in the garden beside the house, and in the pasture. People really believed the stories about Mr. Wesler's buried money.

Mr. Wise said the boys didn't find all the money. "There's more money buried on that farm, but nobody will ever find it, not in a hunnerd years."

Jolley and I poked around, just looking. He found a spent .22 shell. I looked at the boarded up well and felt a shudder pass through me. On the porch near the door, I found a dark stain about the size of my hand. I traced the outline of it with my bare toe and wondered what it would feel like to bleed and die. I looked around for Jolley. He was in the field looking at the holes. Some were pretty deep.

I didn't get my bike that summer, but Daddy got back on at the furniture plant that fall, and he bought me a bike for Christmas. It was the one I wanted, too.

I often think about that summer, about Ralph and Eugene. I think about money buried in the fields around the old Wesler place, and I wonder if anyone will ever find it.

Angela Fetrat

Morning Dew on the Grass

Second Place ~ Art

No One Knows Anyone
- *After Marianne Moore*

James Cox

Second place ~ poetry

Out on his own, a gray coat
worn and wrinkled, walking wordlessly his path,
breathing clean air.

He loves to see the systems
of trees, their crowns, their gnarly bark. Their bodies,
prodigious

or slim, all sway in the wind.
He walks beside rock ledges, earth's dry brute bones—
gray and tan, cracked

edges, chips in piles below.
He stops to watch a rattlesnake, a rock jack
sailing, alien.

Yellow eyes, slit, seem wise in
ways hermetic. He gathers heat, kicks back weeds.
Trees with knots big

as bowls shake their stick fingers.
He stumbles on a broke limb hidden under
leaves and falls down

fast, cracks his head and cries out,
rolls over on his back, a warm buzz around.
The sky snaps white,

a long swirling moment, he
tumbles up in space, like a leaf climbing an
invisible

circular staircase, rising
up to free air from tilting dubious ground.
Above the trees

gray clouds hum, thunder rumbles.
Birds perched on branches watch as he angles by.
From a distance

far, he hears a festival,
sounds he can't fathom, the voices of many
strangers, long passed,

a carnival with one cheer.
He knows now, without doubt, he has always been
invisible.

Logs and a Pile of Eggs

Lee Budahl

Second place ~ Short Story

"This looks more like a medieval dungeon than part of a modern paper mill," Gene said as he stepped out of a stone arch and looked up at the rock dome above him.

"Sure enough," said Karl behind him. "And we get to do real, dangerous serf work." Then he grinned. "It's not all serfdom, though. There aren't any supervisors here on eleven-to-seven, so we can have some fun with the logs. I'll show you how later."

The logs, three feet long and a foot thick, smooth and wet, formed a forty-foot high haphazard pile in the center of the dome's concrete floor. The pile almost reached the half-dozen glowing pale yellow bulbs that surrounded a rectangular opening in the top of the dome.

Karl put his heel on a log before him and pushed; it rolled away and stopped against another log at the base of the pile. "The job isn't complicated," he said and then pointed to the opening. "Up there during the day they debark and cut pulp logs into these lengths and drop 'em down here. Then at night when it's safe—ha ha—we pile 'em on those carts and haul 'em to the grinder room through that arch. There we take 'em off the carts, pile 'em beside the grinders, and come back here and do it again.

"It's boring as hell, but you gotta stay sharp. Those logs are slippery and that makes 'em as unstable as a pile of eggs. When you pull a log off, it can let a bunch of others go, and they can come down fast enough to hit you if you're not quick.

"Those poles with the medieval hooks on one end are intended to keep us relatively safe. We're supposed to stand here at the edge and pull out a log that isn't touching anything and put it on the cart. But eventually we're going to have to pull one that's touching another, so the pile is going to shift from time to time."

"Great place to work," Gene replied. "At least we're here only 'til fall semester. That's a better deal than the serfs had."

"I guess....Though there's a sort of medieval comic relief built into the job—a regular named Eldon who's not playing with a full deck. He's a lot of laughs without even knowing it. He should be here by now....There he is. He comes in through the canteen so he can see Annie."

Eldon approached them around the perimeter of the log pile. His broad shoulders were sloped, and his hands and wrists extended well below the cuffs of his plaid shirt. He walked slowly toward them with short, shambling steps, looking up at the pile from beneath heavy brows, his mouth open and slack. As he put his lunch bag on the table inside the arch, Karl asked, "What do you say, Eldon? Did you see Annie?"

Eldon grinned uncertainly. "Yeah. I bought a Baby Ruth from her."

"Did you ask her for a date?"

Eldon looked briefly at the floor. "Naw. She wouldn't ever go out with me. She's too pretty. Besides, I ain't even got a car." He turned to the logs. "They piled 'em up pretty high yesterday, didn't they?"

"All the better for digging," Karl smiled.

Eldon continued to gaze at the pile. "What do you mean by 'digging'?" asked Gene.

"That's when you don't use the poles the way you're supposed to. Instead, you use 'em to break the monotony. You pull logs out from the middle of the pile to see how deep a cave you can make before the whole thing collapses. When it does, you have to be ready to jump because the whole pile can shift and squirt out logs like bullets."

"Sometimes they're real fast," Eldon said, nodding his head. "It's not very safe."

"Nah," said Karl. "We're all too quick and smart to get caught by a dumb log. Besides, the pile usually grunts or squeaks before anything happens. If you hear that, you get behind a cart or one of the arches."

Eldon slowly shook his head. "I don't know... They're pretty high tonight. This might not be a good time to dig."

"That'll make it all the more fun," grinned Karl. "And you can tell Annie how brave you are. She'll be impressed by that."

Eldon looked down and said softly, "I don't know. Maybe I'll just take my logs from the outside edge like usual."

Karl shrugged, and as he did, the eleven o'clock horn sounded. Each of the three pulled a heavy, steel-frame cart to the edge of the pile and began stacking logs inside its frame. Eldon's cart was the first filled. He grasped the handle behind him, leaned forward, and pulled the cart slowly to the grinder-room arch. Karl, and then Gene, soon followed him. They worked in silence until the three o'clock supper horn sounded.

As they gathered around the table under the arch, Karl winked at Gene and pointed to the clock in the next space. "Hey, Eldon, what time is it?"

Eldon stopped unrolling his lunch bag, peered at the lighted disc, and then said slowly and thoughtfully, "It's either three-twelve or twelve-three...." He frowned in concentration for several seconds, his hand paused in his sandwich bag. "Twelve, three," he muttered. "No, that ain't....No—it's not that either...I don't know...but the horn just blew, and it blows at supper time. So it must be three o'clock." He pulled out a sandwich and bit into it.

"Way to go, Speedy," said Karl. "When will it blow again?"

"That's easy," smiled Eldon. "Just after we finish eating. It always does."

Karl chuckled.

In a few minutes, the horn sounded. Eldon closed his lunch bag, placed it in the center of the table, and pulled his cart to the edge of the log pile and began loading.

"We're ahead of the grinders now," said Karl, "so we can do some digging." He picked up a pole and hooked the end of a log halfway to the top of the pile. The logs stirred and the pile creaked.

Karl and Gene stepped behind an arch pillar while Eldon stood behind his cart, peering at the pile. Several logs near the top rattled and reorganized themselves, and then a single log slid from the reorganized group, fell to the floor, and rolled slowly toward Gene's cart.

Gene took the pole and hooked a log near the gap left by Karl's log. Expecting resistance, he jerked backward. The log slid out of the pile as though it were on wheels, causing him to stumble backward. "Huh," he said. "Nothing to it."

Karl chuckled. "Beginner's luck." He hooked a log beside the widening gap and pulled it. This log resisted, and only after pulling from several angles was Karl able to work it free. A dent in the pile was now clearly visible.

Gene hooked the claw onto the end of a log that was inside the dent. It came out partially; Gene kept pulling, and then with a click, the log disengaged and slid halfway down the pile.

"Not bad," said Karl. He pushed the pole into the dent, hooked a log, and pulled. The log moved a few inches and then refused to go any farther. "Well, hell," said Karl. "Gotta get something out." He hooked a log on the opposite wall of the dent. It resisted his pull only slightly and then slid out and tumbled all the way down the pile to the floor.

Gene studied the pile and said, "Let's take a chance." He pushed the pole into the darkest recess of the dent. He hooked a log and pulled, but nothing moved. He pushed in and then pulled again. Now a log slid out and caught at an angle on the bottom edge of the dent.

"I believe we have the beginning of a cave," grinned Karl. "Let's see what I can get." He pushed the pole into the dark area, jammed the hook into a log, and pulled. Nothing moved. He worked the pole up and down. Almost in answer, a low rattle came from inside the pile; then the logs on one side jerked and twisted as though they were alive.

Eldon, just back from the grinder room, joined Karl and Gene in watching the pile. Logs began to slide down its sides; one, then several, leaped outward as though blasted by silent dynamite; then a giant fistful of logs flew toward them. Gene stumbled backward, tripped, and fell behind a sheltering arch. Karl stood frozen, staring at the logs dancing and flying around him. Eldon leaped toward him; his long arms flew to Karl's shoulders and shoved him to safety behind the cart. Eldon turned back toward the other cart; as he did, two logs slammed with machine-gun rapidity against his arm and side, knocking him to the floor.

Then the pile was silent, except for a single log erratically finding its way down the far side. Eldon tried to push himself up with one arm, grimaced, and fell backward. His other arm lay along his body, his hand rotated at an unusual angle.

On the other side of Eldon's cart, Gene stepped from behind the arch and stared at the reshaped pile. Karl stood up behind his cart and said, "There's some action for you. Except that idiot Eldon knocked me down when I wasn't looking. I don't...." He stopped as Eldon grunted. He and Gene ran to the sound and looked down. Eldon's face was twisted in pain. "Damn," said Karl. "I'll bet we're in trouble now."

Gene knelt beside Eldon and said, "Take it easy. Don't try to move. What's wrong?"

Eldon opened his eyes. "Them logs...hit me," he muttered, wincing as he spoke. "My arm...hurts awful bad....It really does...."

Gene put his hand on Eldon's chest. "Just lie still. We'll get a stretcher and take you to the nurse's office." He looked up at Karl. "You know where to find one?"

"Yeah. I'll get it."

Gene nodded, rose, and pulled logs away from Eldon. Then he moved the cart between Eldon and the pile.

In minutes Karl and two men with a stretcher returned to the log room. The four carefully lifted Eldon onto the stretcher.

Eldon grunted once with pain, smiled weakly, and said, "Thanks."

The two men lifted the stretcher, and one said, "You fellows keep working. We'll try to find someone to take his place."

As the men carried the stretcher into the arch by the clock, Karl said, "Hell. Now we can't take any more time to dig, especially if they can't find someone. Dammit. That dimwit should've known I was quick enough to get out of the way. All he had to do was get himself behind a cart."

Gene bent to pick up a log. "Yeah...Well, maybe he didn't want to take a chance on you getting hurt."

Alex Ribeiro

ANDREA MINARD

Nantahala Falls

Nicholas Braden

Looking ahead to the surging water
Bubbling, gurgling, faster now swirling
The white caps frolicking around the jagged rock
Spiraling, jumping, stabbing and thrusting
The distance grows short and timing even shorter
The fall, the drop, the flying motion and sudden stop
I can imagine all the endings that might arise
The drowning, smashing, deathly cold everlasting
I put fear behind me and my paddle in front
Pushing, sweating, still somewhat dreading
I inch closer to the falls, awaiting the rush
Butterflies, bees, and a shaking in my knees
The time has come; I'm to make my move
Strong, swift, not a single stroke missed
I ride the wave in a most fluid descent
Stability, grace, the gentle sting of water in my face
I paddle safely into an eddy behind the rock
Awake, alive, this is where I thrive
I crushed that rapid, just like I had hoped
Wishes, dreams, and a smile that gleams
Washing down below, I climb out of the boat
Dripping, soaked, my adrenaline now provoked
I collect myself and all of my gear
No lies, no pretend, I'm gonna go run it again

Wonder

James Cox

Stand outside here beside the hive.
Observe their busy many-ness.
The bees all look the same.
Dull yellow black striped bodies
crawl around and over each other.

But what if, inside the hive,
inside the bee's own mind,
the bee knows itself to be unique,
an individual so different from the others
that it values its own life,
understands its own importance.

And in doing so, realizes
that the stream of death that runs
through the hive and stops
the whirring song, the beating breath,
the dedicated making, is unprecedented.

So many drop to the dry ochre,
writhe, curl and wither, divided
from their dance. They send
their precious wonder swirling,
away, away, away,
back out to the universe.

Erick Mendez

Rebecca Harper

Butterflies and I

George Frizzell

There's a tall plant in my yard
8 feet high
topped with a crest
of light lavender petals
in circular clusters
I don't know its name
it might be
as some neighbors insist
a weed
But butterflies
of orange, black
and white embroidery
alight
on its dense crown
as monarchs
It all sways in the wind
a slim stem base
with thick leaves
My neighbors say
I should cut it down
Maybe they see it
from a different view
knowing it a weed
But the butterflies
and I
like it
as it
sways
in the
wind

Desire

Lauren Wilcox-Meyer

Tree of a jeweled cape, bold tail feathers
banded black. Polished line at end.
The hawk looks left then right,
again and again, reading.
He is a book to read.
I planned to limb the tree
until its driftwood branch reveals my father,
redeemed.

He takes wing to the bitter air,
sudden, with broad shoulders.
Mute sable beak.
Light will taper on a mouse,
float a lock and key.
Enough to keep the world in motion

Emily Southard

Gabriel Crawford

Mi Amor
(with translation, My Lover)

Patricia H. Graham

Yo siento su respiración sobre mi cuello-
Y sus susurres en mis oídos
El tacto de tus manos alrededor mi cuerpo
Y tiemblo con un placer insospechado

Un amante que buscar las curvas de mí piel sedosa
Mientras nos abrazamos
El gusto de sus labios rojos deliciosamente
Y me llena de sus dulces deseos

Un intercambio de promesas en la oscuridad
De satisfacer una vez más nuestro deseo

Yo anhelo el tacto de mi amante una vez más
En esta noche absolutamente solitario

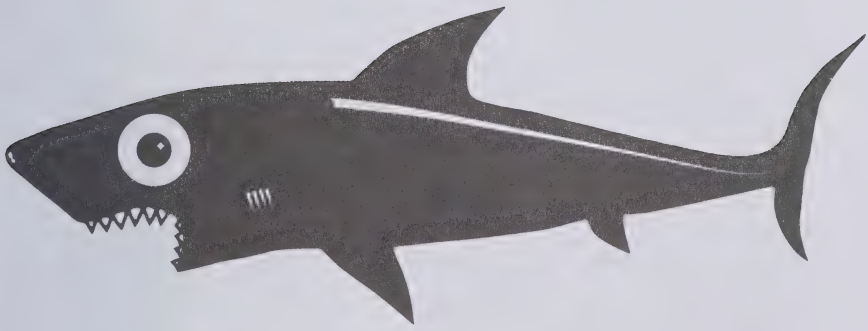
I feel your breath upon my neck-
As you whisper in my ear
The touch of your hands surrounds my body
as I tremble with an unsuspected pleasure

A lover who searches for the curves of my silky skin
While we are embraced
I love the taste of your deliciously red lips
And it fills me with such sweet desires

We exchange promises in the dark, only
to satisfy once more our lust

Oh, how I yearn for the touch of my lover once more
On this solitary lonely night.

Amanda Churi Menichello



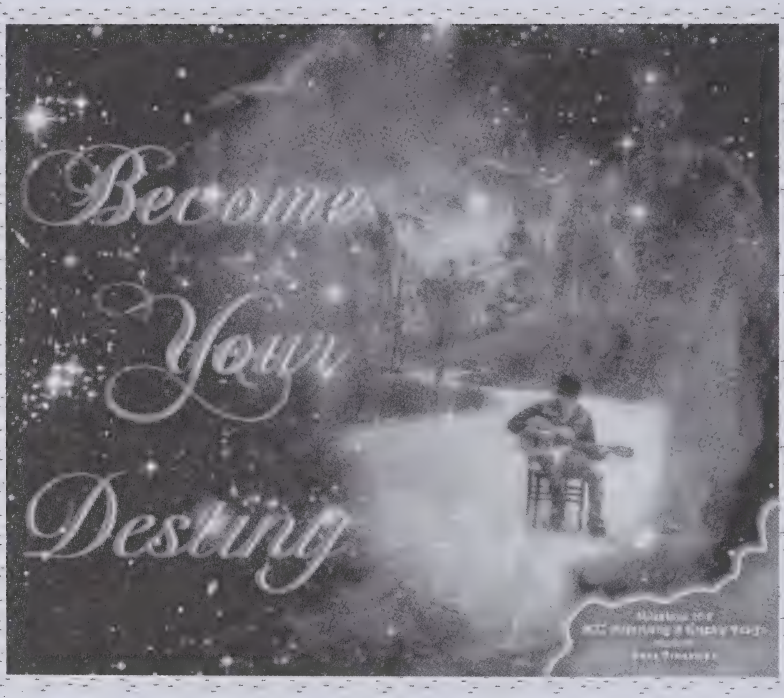
Will Studenc

The Beach

Sara Lee Hinnant

The scent of salt and sea shells
Permeates my memory
Of childhood trips. All in the
Station wagon; six children
With luggage, cooler, and toys
Carefully loaded to fit.
We meet at the beach eager
To build castles in the sand
With cousins from New York,
Texas, and South Carolina.
A house full with eight adults,
Eighteen children and the dogs.
The parade begins with chairs
Carried by Dads, a cooler
For the R.C., towels, and
Toys as we climb over dunes.
We are on our knees searching
For shells, or on tire tubes
Riding waves back to the shore.
Lugging it all back again
We hose ourselves and the toys,
Then it's race to the showers;
Tomato sandwiches with
Iced tea and watermelon,
And naps listening to the
Surf outside while fans inside
Whirl cooling air around us.

FAITH WEBB



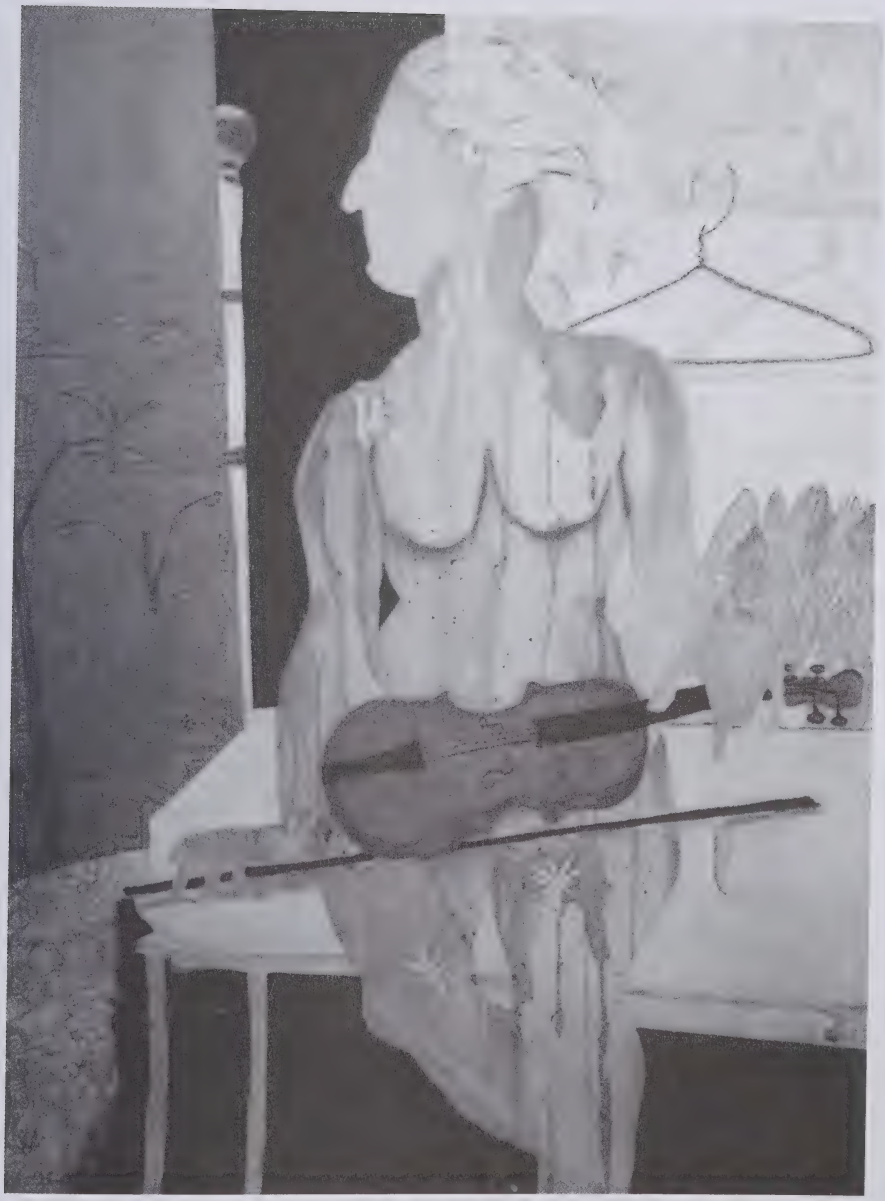
Dana Dimantova

Ebb and Flow

Rachel Harbaugh

When did your eyes stop staring at me when my eyes looked elsewhere?
Sometime halfway between the fall and late summer that caused your throat to clench up as you murmured the words
"I love you" that made you realize
That maybe love is just another word for acknowledging one's presence
Because my father says he loves me
But he still hollers at me
Whenever I slip back into
The skin of a nine year old girl
Who is not good enough—is never good enough
To be acceptable in her father's eyes.
This is not a poem about daddy issues.
But this is a poem about love and hatred and the indifference between
Ever since I was a child I have felt too much.
Momma would chide me for searching out the ghosts and whispers of the past
But I couldn't help it.
(really, momma, i couldn't)
Because everyone in this world has eyes
Stained by loss
And tears
And mud slung in their face
By people who just don't care
Over and over again.
And Momma, you made me a fixer.
So I look out for the smiles
And laugh lines

And the crinkly eyes
For the feet that dance
And for the bodies
That seem to believe
They are never gonna die.
I look for the happiness fakers
And the hopeful pessimists
Who believe that fiddle strings
And mountain air
Can save their soul
But darlin'
You didn't want to be fixed
I bandaged your sweet battered heart
A little too tight
And made you cold.



Amanda Gaebel

Jackson Ridenour

The Scout Troop

Robert Satterwhite

Carl Patton had never been more than a hundred miles from home when he graduated from high school and joined the Merchant Marine, spending the next thirty years traveling to seaports all over the world. When he retired from the Merchant Marine, having seen everything he could ever want to see and having been everywhere he could ever want to go, he came home to live with his elderly parents on their small farm on Five-Mile Round near Flat Top Mountain School for Children, where I lived at the time. He had never married, and he had no place else to go. Mr. Patton's father had hopes that Carl would take over the farm that had been idle for years, but Carl had never developed a taste for farming, which was why he left home in the first place. Carl wasn't even interested in making a garden or raising a calf for beef, so he had more spare time than most adults in the community. Possibly out of boredom, or maybe out of some sense of civic duty, he decided to form a Boy Scout troop.

After Pastor Wilson announced at church that Mr. Patton was forming the troop, Mr. Johnston, the school's headmaster, agreed to let anyone thirteen and over join, "as long as it doesn't interfere with your work." The troop met once a month on Friday evenings after dinner at the church. Hubert, Ralph, Paul, and I joined from our room. R.L., Baby Ray, and Freddie joined from the other larger boys' room. Little Red joined from the intermediate boys' dorm. Lenny Wise was the only boy from the community in the troop.

The church gave Mr. Patton money to purchase uniforms, but it wasn't enough to buy uniforms for everyone. After some thought, he bought two complete outfits, one medium and one small, and we took turns wearing them. The sizes were hardly standard, and for everyone except Little Red, Lenny, Paul, and me, the uniforms were either too small or too large. Paul and I were the ideal mediums, and Little Red and Lenny were the ideal smalls. Little Red especially liked wearing the uniform, and when it came his turn, he would dress out in the green pants and shirt, the blue neckerchief, and the Army-style cap, stand before the mirror, give three-fingered Scout salutes, and act as if he were the sharpest Boy Scout around. The uniforms came with a sash to display merit badges, but no one had a merit badge to display. Lenny brought some of his father's war medals, and we pinned them on our sashes. The medals did add a certain dash to the uniforms.

"I wouldn't wear those medals in public if I was you," Mr. Patton said. "I don't think anybody'll believe any of you boys earned a Purple Heart."

Mr. Patton tried to shape us into a presentable troop, but he never could get us completely organized, especially when it came to earning merit badges, which were required for advancement in rank: Tenderfoot, First Class, Life, and, the ultimate, Eagle Scout. No one advanced beyond Tenderfoot because no one earned the required number of merit badges. Mr. Patton said it was embarrassing to go to a council meeting and come back empty handed. "All the other Boy Scouts earn merit badges," he said. "Why can't you boys get one once in a while?"

The reason was simple. Each time we started a project, we discovered about halfway through that we lacked a key component—a special tool, materials, a resource book, transportation. When one of us asked the headmaster for something, his reply was, "Be resourceful, boys. That's what scouting's all about."

I failed a carpentry merit-badge examination because the bird house I built didn't have a hole for the bird. I didn't have anything to make a hole with. Hubert suggested that I paint one on the house with black paint, which I did. The Scout Council, naturally, rejected the project. Little Red failed bird lore when he identified the national bird as a "dominecker rooster."

"You mean you don't know what our national bird is?" the incredulous examiner asked.

Little Red squirmed, pulled on his neckerchief, and gave it another try. "Is it a dominecker hen?"

On the way home, still embarrassed by the laughter, Red said, "It looked like a daggone dominecker to me. How can you identify something you ain't never seen?"

Mr. Patton handed Little Red a quarter. "See what's on the back side? That's an eagle. Take a good look at it."

"Looks like a buzzard to me. I've seen plenty of buzzards."

Mr. Patton put the quarter back in his pocket and drove in silence.

The troop didn't do much better at orienteering, a merit badge course in woodsmanship. Mr. Patton mapped out a course for us to follow one Sunday afternoon, gave us a compass and a map, and sent us into the woods. We spent about three hours following a two-mile trail, making side-trips instead of staying on course, visiting an old sawmill, an abandoned moonshine still, an old fishing camp at Johns Lake. When we returned to the church, no one had the compass, and, of course, no one would admit losing it.

"That compass cost me $10," Mr. Patton said. He was ready to send us to look for it when we discovered that Little Red was missing. No one could remember seeing him on the trail. Mr. Patton organized us into a search party, and we spent the remainder of the afternoon looking for Red.

About 6 p.m., Mr. Patton gave up. "It'll be dark before long," he said. "I guess we'd better tell Mr. Johnston. He may want to call the rescue squad. I just hope that boy didn't get to the lake and drown or something."

When we returned to the church, Little Red was sitting on the front steps.

"Where in the Sam Hill have you been?" Mr. Patton demanded.

"Right here," Red said. "I got tard and come back."

Little Red had walked only a half-mile, fell behind, turned around, went back to the church, and took a nap on one of the pews.

The final straw, though, was the camping trip. Mr. Patton announced at a troop meeting that we were going on an overnight outing to Wildcat Rock on the edge of the Great Gorge the following weekend.

"This should be an easy merit badge, but I'm sorry to say that all of you can't go," he said. "Lenny can go if his parents give permission, and Red can go. Mr. Johnston said the boys on kitchen duty can't go, and only three of the farm boys can be excused."

"Shit," said Freddie, who was on kitchen duty. "I never get to do nothing."

"I wish you wouldn't use that foul language," Mr. Patton said. "It's not fitting for a Boy Scout. We'll draw straws. Long straws go; short straws stay."

Hubert, Baby Ray, and I drew the long straws. Paul smiled. "Wonder why come it is that ever time you want something real bad, you never get it," he said. "If I hadn't a wanted to go, I bet I'da won. That's the way it always works. Funny, ain't it."

Freddie spent the rest of the day trying unsuccessfully to bribe one of us into trading places. A dollar was as high as he would go, though.

"Gimme five dollars, Freddie, and you can take my place," Hubert said.

"I'd give it to you if I had it," he said. "I can pay you later?"

"Nope. Pay now or forget it."

"You're a turd, Hubert."

"Yeah, but I'm a lucky turd."

We met at the church Saturday morning after breakfast.

"You boys can sleep under this tarp," Mr. Patton said, unloading a large, heavy piece of canvas from his pickup.

He had assembled a decent amount of gear, some of it his own, some borrowed: three real sleeping bags and two made from wool blankets that had been sewn together; a gas lantern; an axe; trench tool; first-aid kit; assorted pots, pans, tin plates, and eating utensils; a small pup tent; and some other gear.

Hubert reached for the tent.

"Keep your tail-scratchers off that tent," Mr. Patton said. "That's mine, and it's a one-man tent. He picked up the tent, a sleeping bag, and the only rucksack.

"Divide up the rest." He gave each of us a tow sack fitted with strips of old horse harness for straps. "You can use these as a backpack," he said. "Make sure you get a sleeping bag or blanket and load up your sacks with the rest of the gear. Everybody has to carry something. We'll meet out front in fifteen minutes."

We pilfered food from the school's kitchen pantry, just in case we didn't like what Mr. Patton brought. We picked through the remaining gear, arguing over who was going to carry the heavy stuff, especially the tarp, which weighed a ton. Finally, the decision was made democratically: the quickest boys got the light stuff and left the heavy gear for the others.

Wildcat Rock was a six-mile hike from the church. The first part of the hike was on Five-Mile Round, which was easy hiking. The longest and roughest part was over a rutted, old logging road that wound around the western rim of Great Gorge. It was not an easy hike, and frequent rest stops were necessary so that Baby Ray could catch up. Ray cried the last four miles, and Mr. Patton made the rest of us help with Ray's sack. Every time Baby Ray fell behind, Mr. Patton would make us stop and wait for him.

"I wish that sissy had stayed home," Little Red said. "All he's doing is spoiling it for everbody else. My sister coulda made it better than him."

The gear in the makeshift packs bunched up at the bottom of my sack and banged constantly against the small of my back. After a few miles, I took the pack off and carried it slung over my shoulder. By the time we reached Wildcat Rock, we were hot, sweaty, and worn out. We dumped our sacks and flopped on the ground.

"Come on, boys," Mr. Patton said. "Plenty of time to rest after we make camp. Everybody collect some firewood. Make sure it's dry, and don't damage any live trees."

We grumbled and headed into the woods.

"I thought this was supposed to be fun, not work," Hubert complained. "The only reason I came was to get out of work."

When we returned, arms loaded with wood, Mr. Patton had his pup tent set up near two large rocks.

"We'll string the tarp over there between those trees," he said. "Who's got the tarp?"

We looked at each other. "Not me's" echoed around the circle.

"Didn't anyone bring the tarp?" he asked. He looked around the group. No one spoke. "Well, I guess you'll just have to sleep out in the open. You better hope it don't rain."

We got out the sleeping bags and blankets and found smooth places in the leaves

for our beds. We collected rocks and made a ring for a campfire. When camp was set up, Mr. Patton took us up the trail to Pinnacle Rock, a huge granite outcropping perched high above the middle section of Great Gorge, a deep, narrow channel flanked by two high ridges, its sheer sides covered with thick growths of stunted pine, hemlock, and fir. Dense, green patches of laurel and rhododendron spread among the conifers so thick, the growth seemed to be one continuous bush. Far below at the bottom of the channel, Great Gorge River gushed over an endless chain of rocks and boulders, roaring in the distance like the sound of wind. Instead of the foreboding, wild place I had imagined, it was ruggedly beautiful. Far as I could see were rounded mountain ridges covered with a smoky gray-blue haze. To the right, near the lake, was Flat Top Mountain, square and blunt, like a slightly tilted table, its smooth, rocky sides glistening in the light of the setting sun. Beyond Flat Top, the river widened and flowed quietly into Johns Lake, a large flat mass of silvery blue water.

"This gorge is twenty miles long," Mr. Patton said, "and it's rough country. You'd have to go out west to Montana or Wyoming to find wilderness like this."

The gorge started far to our left at the junction of East Fork Creek and Wildcat Creek, where a series of waterfalls gushed down the rocky mountainside to form Great Gorge River more than a thousand feet below. Mr. Patton said the pool that the falls dropped into was so deep, no one had been able to reach the bottom.

"There's wild animals in there, boys," he said. "Bears, mountain lions, bobcats, wild pigs, and more rattlesnakes than you can shake a stick at."

I eased to the edge of the rock, looked down at the distant river, and felt a tingling sensation at the base of my scrotum.

Mr. Patton pointed to the ridge across from them. "See that rock up there? What does it look like?"

"Three rocks piled on top of each other," Little Red said.

"Use your imagination, Red."

"It looks a little like a bear," Lenny said.

"You're exactly right. That's Sitting Bear Rock. Now take a look at that rock over there to the left. What's it look like?"

There was no mistaking its shape.

"A rooster's beak," Little Red said.

"You sure have a one-track mind about chickens, don't you, Red? That's Eagle's Beak. See how the rock curves down like the beak on an eagle."

"A rooster's beak does the same thing," Little Red insisted.

Mr. Patton shook his head. "Them thick, shiny patches you see are laurel hells. Nothing else'll grow in them slicks. It's so thick in there, not even a rabbit could get through."

"You ever been down in the gorge, Mr. Patton?" I asked.

"Nope. Don't intend to, neither. My daddy said there's been many a man to go in there and never come out. Sometimes at night, you can see lights flickering in the upper end. People say that's the campfires of the ghosts of people who went down there and died. I don't know of anyone crazy enough to go in there."

By the time we returned to camp, I was starving. The school's cook had fixed sandwiches for us, but we had eaten them on the hike in. Mr. Patton made a small fire. "Okay," he said, "break out the cooking pots and food, and some of you go for water. We'll use this little fire here to cook on; then we'll have a big campfire later."

He stood. "Who's got the pots?"

We looked at each other.

"For crying out loud," Mr. Patton said. "You mean to tell me no one brought the pots?"

No one answered.

"Well, what did you bring? Come on. Dump out your sacks. Let me see."

We dumped the contents of our sacks on the ground: clothes, chocolate drops, comic books, pocket knives, flashlights, a couple of water guns, pork and beans, sardines, and Vienna sausages. Mr. Patton looked at the piles and shook his head.

"Not one single pot. Not even a darn spoon. I can't believe it. You'll just have to make the best of it, boys."

We built a big campfire, opened the cans of pork and beans, Vienna sausages, and sardines, and ate with our fingers. Lenny had a jar of peanut butter that he passed around, and each of us took a stick and dipped into it.

"Save something for breakfast," Mr. Patton said, but there wasn't much left to save by then.

Mr. Patton fixed himself a cup of coffee and sat with us as we talked and watched the fire. The evening was cool, and the fire felt especially warming. Mr. Patton stood up, stretched, farted loudly, and scratched his rear.

"I don't know about you boys, but I'm tired. Believe I'll turn in."

He looked at the blazing fire.

"Make sure the fire's died down good before you boys turn in, okay?"

"Okay," we chorused.

Soon as Mr. Patton was in his tent, Hubert collected laurel leaves and showed us how to make cigars by stuffing the tightly curled leaves with dead grass and dried beech leaves. The cigars were strong and acrid, but that didn't discourage anyone. We kept the fire built up, burning every piece of dry wood available. We sat by the fire, smoking, watching sparks climb into the tree tops and fade, and listening to the seesawing noise of crickets and katydids. About ten o'clock, Mr. Patton crawled out of his tent. The fire was blazing about five feet high.

"Nice fire," he said. "Make sure it's died down good before you turn in, and don't stay up all night." He looked around. "Who's got the toilet paper?"

No one answered.

"Guess no one brought the trench tool either. Never mind, never mind. I'll just use leaves."

He walked off into the woods. He hadn't gone very far when we heard him curse. He came stomping back.

"Just for common decency's sake," he said, trying hard to contain himself. "If you have to take a dump, at least step off the confounded path."

Little Red grinned sheepishly.

Before going to bed, I took my flashlight and walked alone up the trail to the top of Pinnacle and looked into the gorge. A wispy mist had settled in the now darkened chasm, reaching almost to the top of the ridges. A milky quarter moon climbed slowly above Flat Top Mountain. Beyond the lake was the clustered yellow lights of the town of Mimosa. The other end of the gorge was dark—no lights as far as I could see, only wilderness. Not even one ghost light. I lay on my back on the rock and looked at the cloudless sky, the thick band of stars that made the Milky Way, smaller clusters that formed the Big Dipper and the Little Dipper—the only stars I could identify. I thought about getting my sleeping bag and spending the night on the rock, but I couldn't find a soft enough place for a bed. Taking

one last lingering look into the gorge, I walked back down the path to the camp. A barred owl hooted.

"What's at?" Little Red asked, looking at the woods.

"A barred owl," I said. "Listen; it sounds like it's saying, 'Who cooks for you? Who cooks for y'all'?"

"Bull hockey," Little Red said. "It don't sound nothing like that to me."

"Use your imagination a little bit."

"I can use four 'maginations, and it still sounds like hoo, hoo, hoo."

We sat by the fire until, one by one, we got so sleepy, we couldn't keep our eyes open so went to our beds. I eased into my sleeping bag beside Hubert and immediately went to sleep.

I don't know how much later it was, maybe an hour or so, but I woke to shouting. The leaves around Mr. Patton's tent were on fire, and Mr. Patton was in his underwear, beating the flames with a blanket. We watched.

"Don't just stand there like a bunch of idiots, you idiots," he yelled. "Help me put out this fire."

No one was willing to sacrifice a blanket, and we had burned all the brush in sight. Lenny threw a handful of dirt on the fire, and Little Red tossed in a few rocks. Hubert, Baby Ray, and I tried to stamp it out, without much success. Mr. Patton finally put it out by himself. He had black smudges on his legs and underwear, his blanket was sooty and had burn holes in it, and his tent had a big scorched place on one side. He stood with his hands on his hips, staring us down. Then, he began cursing. I had never heard anyone curse like that. We slunk to our beds.

Mr. Patton got up early Sunday morning, packed his gear, slung his pack on his shoulders, and, without speaking, headed down the trail.

"Guess we ain't spending the day," Hubert said. We quickly loaded our sacks and rushed to catch up.

The following Friday, on the regular meeting night, we went to the church, two of us in uniforms as usual. The door was locked, so we waited on the steps.

After about half an hour, Lenny said, "I don't think he's coming."

We waited another thirty minutes, not saying much, just sitting there.

"He ain't coming, I bet you anything," Little Red said.

"It's 'cause y'all made him mad," Freddie said. "Ray told me about how everbody was smoking and let the fire get out."

"Eat a turd, Freddie," Hubert said. "Baby Ray was smoking, too."

"I only took one puff," Baby Ray whined. "That's all."

"One puff or a hunnerd, it's still smoking."

"What time is it?" I asked.

"Fifteen to eight," Lenny said, the only one who had a watch.

"I guess he's not coming for sure," I said.

We walked back to the school. Lenny went home.

We didn't have another troop meeting. Little Red was especially disappointed because it was his turn to wear the uniform.

We saw Mr. Patton at church after that, but he never mentioned the Scout troop, nor did he call another meeting.

Tia Corbin

Josh Franks

Hollow Graves

Rachel Harbaugh

We took her down
by the river.
Let her body lean
against the rocks
And the dark moss
trailing up the slate
Doing its damnedest to
tear it down.

The Chevy hadn't wanted to start
that evening
Wracking and spitting like
she knew she was gonna
Be a hearse
tonight and haul dead things
Up quiet mountains
instead of
Corn liquor.

But we laid some quilts
in the bed
And Daddy put her in there
and her braid was fixing to come
Undone and I'm gonna blame it on
the half light and truck exhaust and
Daddy's cigar smoke but
seeing her like that
Made it hard to see
and my eyes all foggy like.

We took her down
by the river and
Laid her on a bed
of rocks and her
Glassy eyes must
have watched us as we tore our
Hands into the red dirt
over and over again
Till there was a hole

6 foot down and 4 foot wide
Gaping out of the earth.
The river was running high
that day
Probably because of spring coming
and snow melting
And she would come out here
and sing over the sound of
The river
but the only sound we could hear
Was our breathing and the dirt
piling up.

But it was getting
dark and you should let
The dead lie after dark
and she's gone and so we took
Them quilts
And laid them in the hole
As if the cotton'd shield her
from the bugs and decay and rot
And Daddy put her in there
and I would blame it on the half light of cigar smoke
But it's already dark
and Daddy left his tobacco in the truck
So I'll just blame it on the dirt we tossed back in the hole after
We laid her in there instead.

We took her down
by the river
And buried her
near the rocks
And one day the dark moss
is gonna grow into the grave
And do its damnedest to
tear it down.

Benny Garcia

Destiny Jones
Dark Days

Almost

Sara Lee Hinnant

Alice was lucky
She was asleep,
When the air-borne
Car smashed
Down on the truck
She was tucked
Safely in the corner.

I was lucky
To know how,
When the phone
Call came,
To call a hospital;
"This is Rev. Hinnant,
Where is my father?"

We were lucky
To see the strength
Shine in Mama
With glorious beauty
As she held
Our world together
When the truck
Lay in pieces.

Lying Fallow

Betty Holt

Lately I've been lying fallow
No words come, no melodies
Not even thoughts or insights
Or urges to say much
Just going along, copasetic,
Mundane, slightly bored and tired.

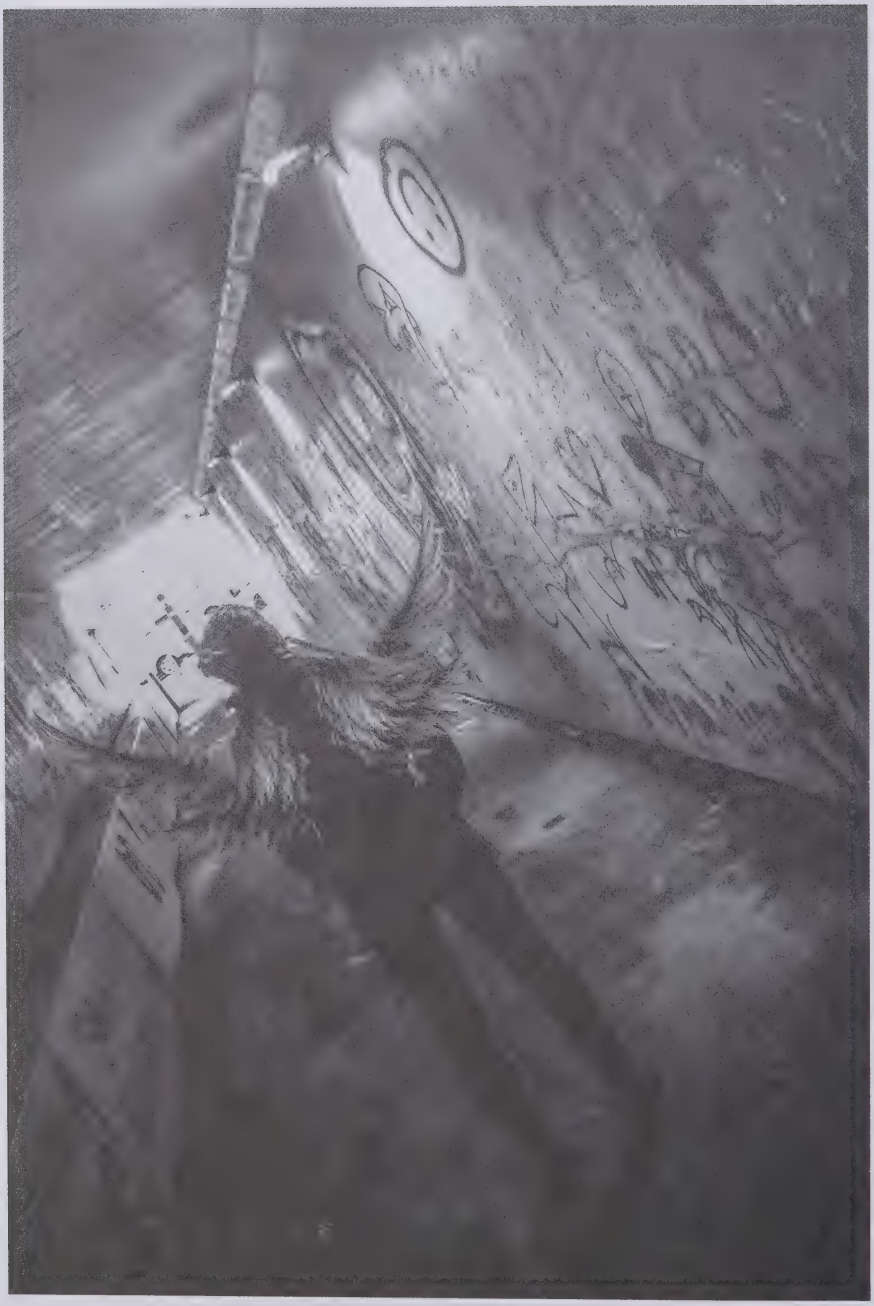
Lying Fallow, like a field that has given and given
Of its nutrients and now needs
To rest and recuperate, take from Nature the food it needs.
Like the Winter that comes after the
Summer of ideas and before the re-birth
Of Springtime and new life.

Lying Fallow, a place called "hanging in the dangle",
When one thing has ended and the next thing
Has not yet begun…and it feels like nothing ever
Will again

But the seeds of Spring are planted in Winter
And though it's hidden from the human eye, the energy begins to
Take form and build, until the moment comes
For it to break through the hard ground
And become what it was intended

I wait…for there's nothing else to do…
And I clean the closets of my life,
Knowing some speck of nostalgia
Might move me, might create a sound
In my head that would connect with my hands
And flow onto the paper.
I actively wait.

Casey Lance Brown



Franklin Thompson

Rocking Chair

Jessica Sitton

Rocking in the Rocking Chair
Smelling the thick air
Squinted eyes
And living off lies

Those ghosts hide there
Saying, "It's only fair."
And deciding what to wear
While digging their claws through your hair

That rocking chair over there
Only rocks when it feels care
But will still
When happiness is ill

Through the dark halls
Shadows glided with no care at all
And seeing them
Will freeze every limb

That old rocking chair
Had aged with the air
Making those who haunt
A time to flaunt

Blood on the Bridge

Grant King

There's blood on a bridge down in Selma
From the billy clubs swinging with hate
And the dogs and the troopers that held them
Blood protected by layers of paint

The flow of the waters beneath it
Like the passing of clouds overhead
Won't wash out the honor bequeathed it
Nor the memory of all those who bled

And lest we forget their endeavors
Binding pasts to futures for all
Paint seals those memories forever
Over blood for the peaceful who fall

Cherish the memories of fallen
And those passed on to the Lord
The next time freedom comes calling
May we all be of one accord

Daniel Reed

Emily Kimsey

WHITESIDE

Robert P. Hyatt

In the Blue Ridge Mountains of Western North Carolina there is a sheer granite cliff which rises four thousand nine hundred and thirty feet from the valley floor.

Its name is Whiteside.

Eighty-five years ago in its shadow they first met.

His tractor stands, still.

His tattered hunting coat hangs in her closet.

No longer need squirrels and rabbits fear his deadly missiles.

No longer does his fishing rod send fancy food on shimmering line to entice rainbow colored trout.

His rough hands lie folded in silence.

Still Whiteside remains.

In its ivory shadow she waits.

Like tears its grey streaked shadows run down her face.

Leaning against it she feels its heaviness.

With loving strokes she paints it.

With subtle shades she caresses it.

Playing with light and shadow she sculpts it into being.

Slowly, out of a field of green so delicately verdant it seems the weight of a butterfly would crush it, Whiteside rises massive grey white rock hard.

In her ears the music of this milky mountain echoes. Across her face its reverberating laughter ripples.

Down its chalky cliff his strong voice tumbles toward her.

In its sun bleached radiance she stands.

Now, towering above their snowy bed, Whiteside remains.

Apryldussel Orquin

Khorie Miller

At the Dock

Sara Lee Hinnant

At the dock
We eagerly await
The settling in
Of the great vessel.
Lines are thrown,
Heavy arms and heavy voices
Pull and call,
And we realize
We did not get here
All by ourselves.

At the dock
Far off dreams
We waited for
Are real in the sounds
Of gulls calling,
People greeting,
Metal scraping;
Real in the smells
Of fish, salt water,
The sweat of sailors,
The perfume of lovers.

At the dock
We can hardly wait for the packages for us.
Each thinking
"What is the one thing
I have most wanted?"
And wondering how
You can pack and ship
A little golden girl,
A happy brown boy,
Peace and rest
And time for love?

At the dock
We have waited long enough
And finally we let go
Of boxes of fear
Wrapped in angry red tape,
So our hands are free
To clasp one another
At the dock,
When our ship comes in.

Ghost Town

Grant King

The old boards are bleached in the bright devil sun
Their corners are rounded by sand
Tumbleweed bushes are back on the run
And they're racing down Main Street again

Doors swing open and old hinges creak
The tin on the roof flops around
A hundred years back it had started to leak
Back before everybody left town

The mines played out; the stagecoach shut down
The railroad passed by to the south
No jobs for the few that straggled around
When they left to put food in their mouth

The rattlesnakes stayed and the lizards are there
They hide in the shade so you never could tell
At night they come out for the cool evening air
When it's quiet as the sand in the well

Then the yellow moon shines in a sky black as ink
And the wind plays tricks in your head
The piano plays soft and the glasses still clink
This ghost town belongs to the dead

Connor Sawyer

JAMES WHATLEY

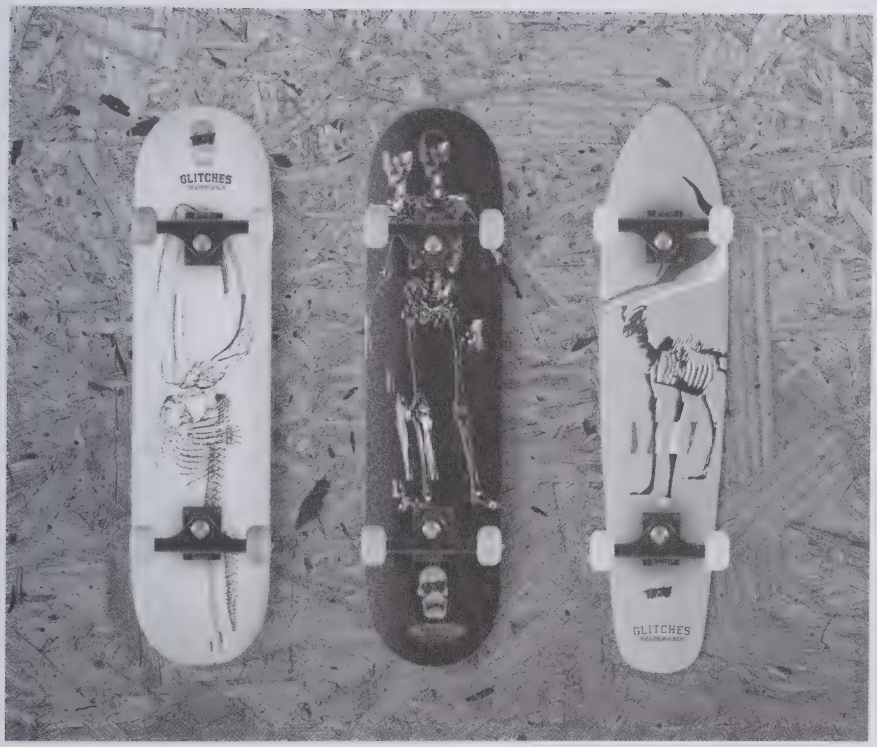
Without End

Michael Revere

Dedicated to Doctor Zhivago

Human reptiles
        blood stained snow
nowhere to go.
Deep rooted pain,
        erupting nightmare,
mother nature wounded
beyond repair.
Madness ruling
        all life forms
from core of earth
to blazing sun.
Purple crows laughing
        feast is on
midnight to dawn.
Please pass black catchup
        Before we say grace
and beg for mercy.

Chloe Collins



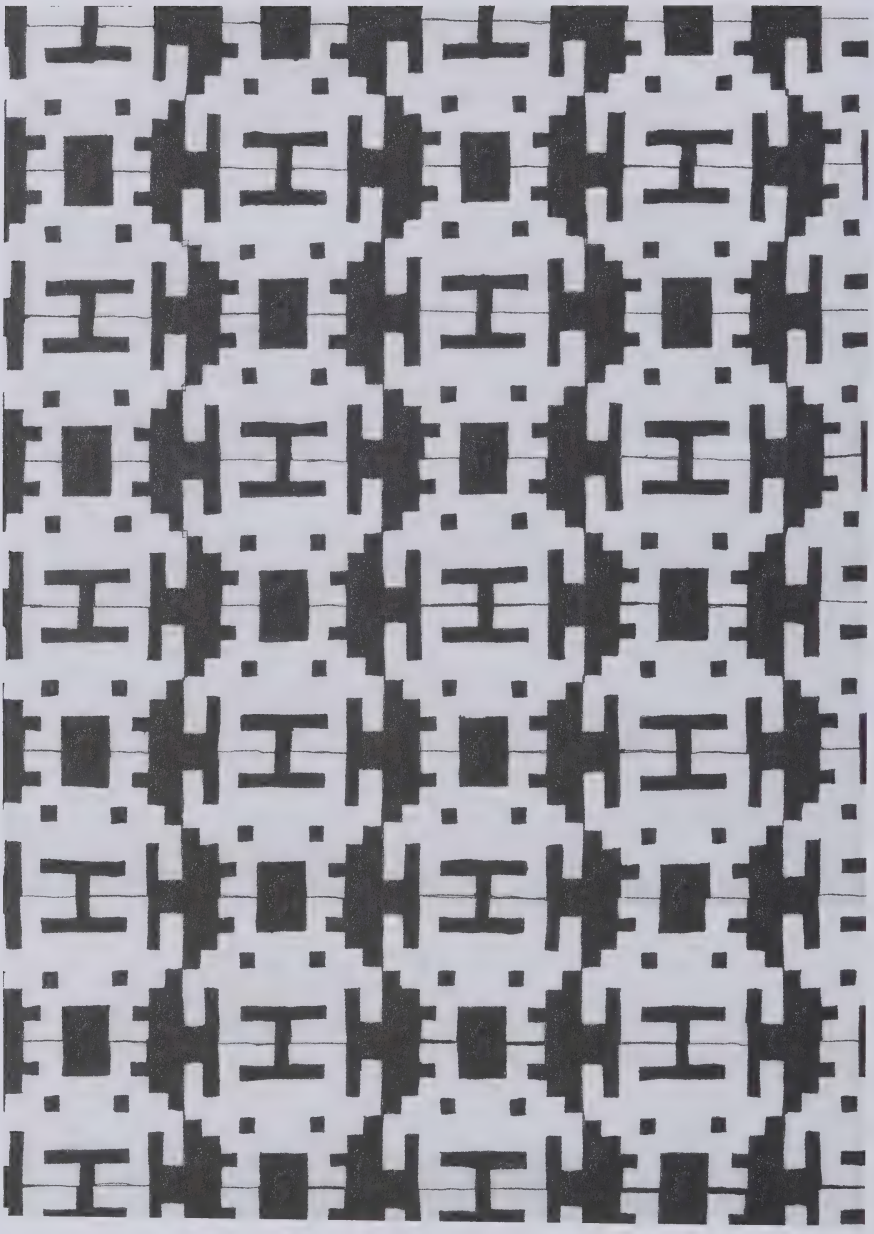
Tyra Maney

Dirt Road Dreams

George Frizzell

sweat soaked face
walking
on a hot road
through even hot shade
walking
past faded jeans
on clothes lines
and flowers
dirt dusted
on the edge of the road
breathing
the powder
they use
to keep the dust down
walking
as cars go by
and dust clouds billow
when more cars approach
you barefoot
my dust streaked boots
as rain came
in these dirt road dreams
of you

Miranda Williamson



Stephanas Wilson

Dancing Upon The Rocks

Rachel Harbaugh

The ironic thing is
My momma raised me
The way all Methodist women
Born and raised in the paradoxical paradise of Southeast North Carolina do.
God's country raised me up.
Bare feet in mud riddled
With tar pockets and
Grains of sand tattooed my heels permanently
Dirty.
Marked me.
Branded me the same way the ashy criss-cross of a Preacher's hands did the Wednesday before Jesus came back.
Made me one of them.
But then I came here.
And I realized that though the
Cape Fear runs through my veins
And my
Soles are hardened by too dry summers on dusty back roads
My heart is entwined with the Tuckasiegee and the ancient sky and the mist that settles in the hollows and low places where all is quiet and broad and full of dark.
I realized the flatlands was where I was raised
But dancing upon these rocks turned me into a woman.

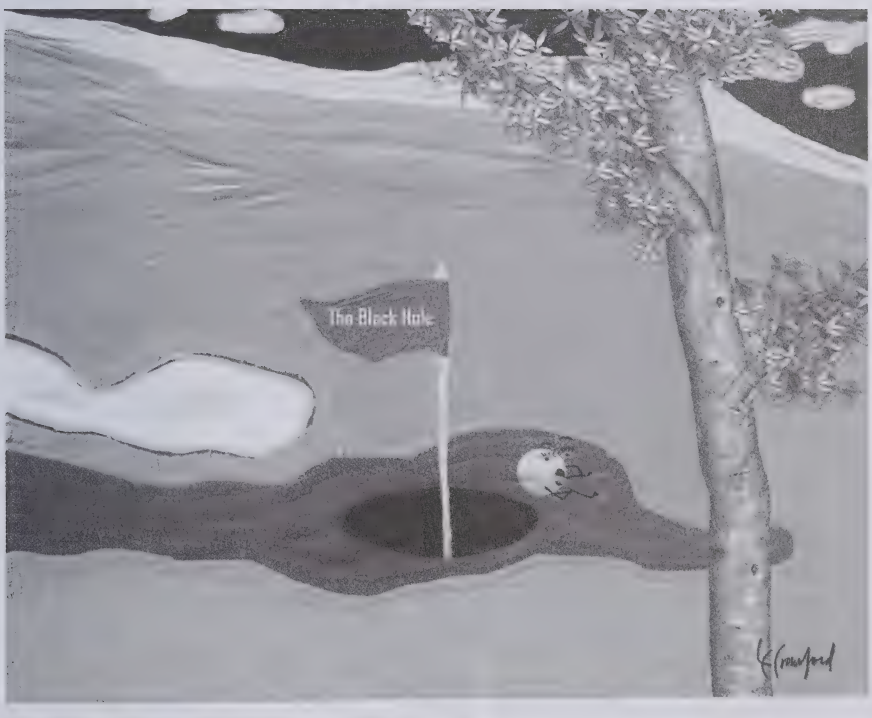
The Sights and Sounds of Childhood

Jean Marie Wright

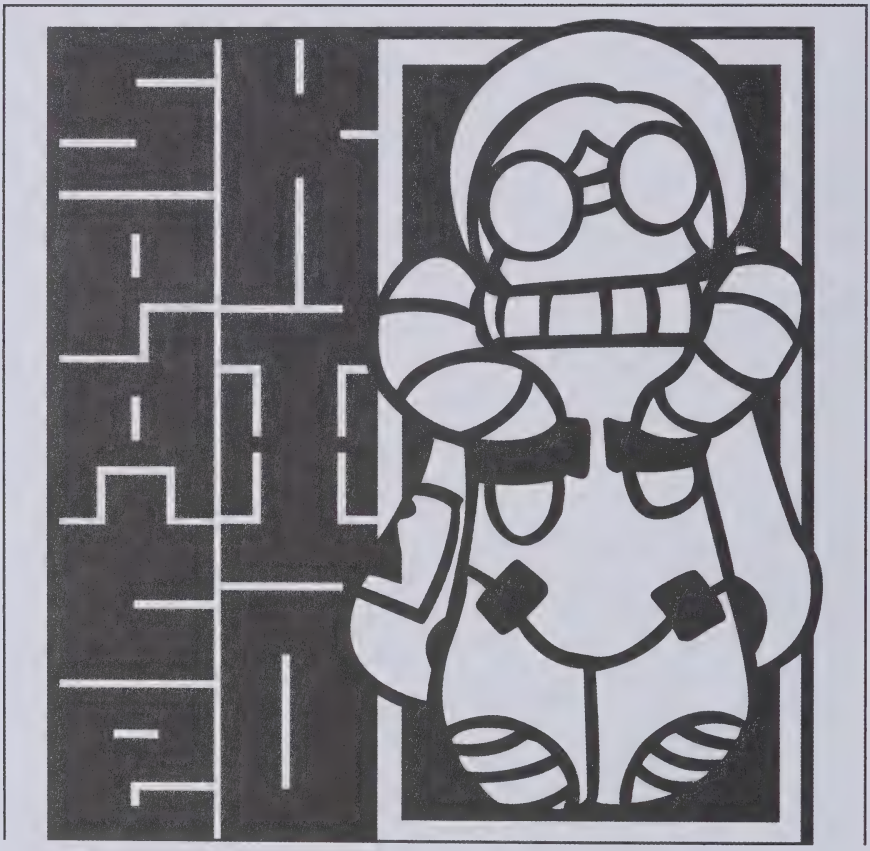
The slap of the screen door as we ran outside to play
The Grammas' windowsills full of flower pots and teacups
Orange trees in full bloom overpowering our noses with their scent
The leap of a wide mouth Bass trying to catch a dragonfly
Ripples spreading on the lake from the same escapade
The soft sound of our parents' voices as they visited over coffee
Great Gramma Grey's raisin tarts warm from Gramma Calhoun's oven
The scent of sunshine in line dried sheets and towels
The waft of ceiling fans stirring the heat of a summer day
Live Oaks draped in Spanish moss
Gramma's Old Hen and Noodles
Watching water spouts dancing on the lake
The frightening bellow of a bull gator in the night
The creak of wooden floors in stores
Wind soughing through the pine trees
Currents of cold spring water coursing through the lake
Watching Night Blooming Cereus unfold in the moonlight
Sunset watching and sipping ice tea at dusk on the lawn
The gathering of family—grandparents, parents and children
Stories told by Grampas, Daddy and Uncles
Tea parties and petite fours
And, yes, the feeling of sand in my sandals

Allan Grant

Emily Kimsey



LAWRENCE CRAWFORD



Elijah Quillen

Brandi Messer

NICOLE WRIGHT

KATHY WILSON

Micaela West

Flea Market

Sara Lee Hinnant

The furnace breaks down.
We carry the old kitchen sink,
The repainted pie safe,
Grandma's rocker, and last
Winter's quilts down
The highway to sell.

A woman towing two children,
A young couple (on a honeymoon?),
And a leather-faced fellow come looking
For a bargain on phone covers,
For ideas on their latest hobby,
For cast away treasures.

They find us,
Tears in our throats.
"No we won't take less."

Call for Submissions

Manuscripts for the 2019 edition of SCC *Milestone* will be accepted through December 6, 2018. In the event that funding is not secured for publication, submissions will be held and considered for the next issue.

Each submission should include the author's name, address, and phone number on the first page. Essays, local history, poetry, and short stories—as well as black-and- white artwork—may be submitted. All submissions should be typed, and it is requested that prose be limited to two thousand (2,000) words.

Seven individuals whose manuscripts or works of art are selected for publication also will receive cash awards:

- First and second prize in poetry
- First and second prize in prose
- First and second prize in artwork
- Cover

Students, faculty, staff, and alumni—along with residents of Macon, Swain, and Jackson counties and the Qualla Boundary—may submit to SCC *Milestone*.

Please send poetry and prose submissions to milestone@southwesterncc.edu, or call 828.339.4314 if you have questions.

Please send artwork submissions to Bob Keeling at bkeeling@southwesterncc.edu, or call 828.339.4317 if you have questions.

For general information, contact Southwestern Community College's Public Relations Office at 828.339.4394.

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